stupidity or treason?" The implication was that there was a consistency in these blunders that could not be explained by stupidity of the members of the ruling clique but revealed its intention to bring Russia to defeat and help Germany to victory. A careful investigation failed to confirm Miliukov's grim suspicion. In the course of the monarchy's disintegration, power had slipped into the hands of stupid, completely irresponsible, and frivolous individuals, but they were not traitors to their country, as the legend had portrayed them.

In January, 1917, Rasputin was killed. Three men were involved in the conspiracy—a member of the Tsar's family, a young aristocrat, and a leader of the Black Hundreds. They gave the public a full account of the murder. The "Dear Friend" of the Tsar was invited to a princely palace. His host treated him to arsenic in a tart downed with champagne, but the poison had no effect on the drunken man. Then the Black Hundreds man killed him with a pistol shot. The police officer posted in front of the palace rushed to the door, but the host sent him away, explaining, "A mad dog has been shot!" The body was put on a sledge, taken to the Neva, and pushed through a hole in the ice.

The newspapers were forbidden to report or comment on this event, but a detailed mimeographed account, allegedly coming from the Governor General's office, circulated in Irkutsk and a large cartoon appeared in one of the leading newspapers of Petrograd: The Neva covered with ice and snow, against the silhouette of the Fortress of Peter and Paul in the background; a large hole in the ice in the foreground, with tracks of a sledge and footsteps around it; and the legend "Farewell, Dear Friend!"

The loathsome details of the murder did not lessen the public's applause. The government did not dare to prosecute those who boasted of having shot the mad dog. The Tsar had had no power to protect his dear friend and had no power to avenge him.

THE VOICE FROM THE ARMY

More rumors were reaching Irkutsk. I was not impressed by the gossip about the imminent palace revolution. This possibility seemed remote, and I doubted whether it could change the course of events. But I was becoming increasingly absorbed in wondering how the disintegration of the Tsarist regime at the top would affect the armed forces at the front.

A young soldier stopped me on one of the main streets. I recognized Sechkin, a local worker, a Social Democrat, who had been called into military service a year earlier and was home on leave. After brief